

Application No. 10/608,995

Filed: June 27, 2003

TC Art Unit: 3679

Confirmation No.: 6412

REMARKS

Claims 1, 4, 5, 7-9, 12-23, 26, 27, 29, 30, 33-36, 39, 40, 42-45, and 48-50 have been rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 102(b) over Lew et al. (US Pat. No. 4,418,948). Reconsideration of this rejection is respectfully requested.

The independent claims 1 and 20 recite, among other things, a coupling device disposed between an end face of a first pipe element and an opposing end face of a second pipe element when the end faces of the pipe elements are axially aligned. The coupling device further has at least one coupling means extending outwardly in an axial direction towards the pipe elements, and the coupling means is configured to engage beads or flanges of the two pipe elements on the outside of the pipe elements.

With the presently claimed invention, the coupling device can be attached to the bead or flange of the first pipe element and will stay there securely. The second pipe element can then be easily laid with its bead or flange in the coupling device. The coupling device then holds together and aligns the two pipe elements, such that the fitter has both hands free for tightening the clamping device around the beads and the coupling device.

With the coupling device of Lew, it would be more difficult to connect the second pipe element to the coupling device and to the first pipe element via the coupling device. Further, the coupling device of Lew does not prevent the pipe elements from moving apart axially during tightening of the clamping device, thus requiring the fitter to hold the pipe elements together

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during clamping. More particularly, as can be seen in Fig. 5 of Lew, elastic ring segments 31 and 32 are disposed between flanges 27 and 28 of pipes 25 and 26. However, the flanges 27 and 28 of Lew are not the end faces of the pipes. The elastic rings segments 31 and 32 are not between the end faces of the pipes 25 and 26 when the pipes are axially aligned. Thus, Lew does not disclose a coupling device between the end faces of the pipes as recited in Applicant's independent claims 1 and 20.

Claims 1 and 20 further recite coupling means extending outwardly in an axial direction and configured to engage beads or flanges on the two pipe elements. Lew does not disclose such coupling means. As can be seen in Fig. 5 of Lew, the elastic ring segments 31 and 32 do not engage the flanges 27 and 28. Thus, claims 1 and 20 are believed to be patentable thereover for this reason as well.

Furthermore, independent method claim 16 recites the steps of arranging a coupling device in engagement with the bead or flange of the first pipe element, and bringing the bead or flange of a second pipe element into engagement with the coupling device with the coupling device disposed between an end face of the first pipe element and an opposing end face of the second pipe element, thus aligning or holding the two pipe elements during assembly. Independent method claim 17 recites a coupling device arranged between the end face of the first pipe element and the opposing end face of the second pipe element when the end faces of the pipe elements are axially aligned. In Lew, the pipes are not coupled in this manner. Rather, the pipes must be held in alignment and then

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the coupling ring can be placed over the pipes. Thus, claim 16 is also believed to be patentable over Lew for this reason as well.

In view of the amendment to claim 1, dependent claim 26 has been rewritten in independent form, and dependent claims 27-36 have been cancelled. Claim 26 also recites a coupling device arranged between the end face of the first pipe element and the opposing end face of the second pipe element when the end faces of the pipe elements are axially aligned. Thus, claim 26 is also believed to be patentable for reasons set forth above with respect to claim 1.

Claims 6, 10, 11, 28, 32, 31, 41, 46, and 47 have been indicated as containing allowable subject matter. Applicants thank the Examiner for the indication of allowable subject matter. These claims are also believed to be patentable for the reasons set forth with respect to claim 1.

As indicated in Applicant's previous response to the final office action, claims 1, 9, 16, 17, and 21 have been objected to regarding the phrase "and/or." This phrase has been deleted and the term "or" has been employed. Claims 5 and 22 have been similarly amended. Accordingly, this objection is believed to be overcome.

Claim 17 has been rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 112, second paragraph. As indicated in Applicant's response to the previous office action, the step to couple the first element and the second

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element has been added to claim 17. Accordingly, this rejection is believed to be overcome.

In view of the above amendments and remarks, all claims are believed to be in condition for allowance, and reconsideration and indication thereof are respectfully requested. The Examiner is encouraged to telephone the undersigned attorney to discuss any matter that would expedite prosecution of the present application.

Respectfully submitted,

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BEH/dkh/316739